

18/02/75

STEVE PERRIN
DOUBLE KEEPS
WANDERERS
IN THE HUNT

TWO goals by Wycombe Wanderers' in-form striker Steve Perrin steered his side to a deserved victory and three points in the Rothmans Isthmian League Division One against Hitchin on Tuesday night. Steve's double, both superbly taken efforts, mean he is now the club's top scorer by a clear five goals.

Although this win keeps Wycombe in fourth place, they are now trailing Dagenham by goal average only and with two games to come against runaway leaders Enfield, the Blues can still be looking for the championship they won last year.

Tuesday's result was thoroughly deserved, for Wanderers were clearly the superior side on the night. Unfortunately they were unable to turn that superiority into goals. Had they done so the final scoreline could have been something like 6-2, which would have been a more fair reflection of play.

Many chances were carved

out, however, when they fell 1-0 at Leatherhead.

Wycombe could have mid-field man Terry Reardon back in the team tomorrow. He missed Tuesday's win over Hitchin and was in bed earlier in the week with a septic throat. If Terry is fit it will present manager Brian Lee with a problem. Dave Alexander, who replaced Reardon, has been improving rapidly recently and had a fine game against Rye at Saturday. Howard Kennedy also looked good on Tuesday night against Hitchin while Mick Holfield is an automatic choice these days. Alexander could be the man to make way.

Although Gary Hand was troubled by his knee injury on Tuesday, he should be fit, which will mean Paul Birdseye return-

By STUART EARP: Wycombe W. 2, Hitchin T. 0

out of the muddy conditions but only two were accepted. Hitchin, too, had their opportunities but fine defensive work by goalkeeper John Maskell and the consistent Keith Mead proved too much for them. At times on Tuesday Wycombe were at their brilliant best. One-touch football flourished at times but the conditions eventually took their toll of flowing football.

At the start of the match Loakes Park looked in fine condition, hardly surprising since this was the first game on the ground for a month. Inevitably, however, the centre of the field became extremely heavy with several players becoming bogged down.

With Terry Reardon still not fit, Paul Birdseye switched from full-back to midfield in place of the unavailable Dave Alexander while Paul Griffiths continued at right-back and Gary Hand returned in great form in the number three shirt. Young Griffiths fully justified his selection with a hard working performance that augurs well for the

future. Birdseye, however, was not at his best in the middle and struggled to get into the game.

The first 10 minutes of the first half must have gladdened the hearts of the Loakes Park regulars, who saw Wanderers dominate proceedings. A superb Howard Kennedy volley, from the angle of the penalty area, saw goalkeeper Doug Parkin concede the first of nine corners, the second coming minutes later from a Keith Searle drive which Parkin again managed to touch away. Alan Phillips then went close with a header and with 12 minutes gone Mick Holfield burst through. Searle dummied Perrin's through ball which left Holfield clear. Mick did everything right, beating the keeper and poking in a shot. On a dry ground it was a certain goal but on this occasion the ball stuck in the mud and Maurice Howkins raced back to clear his line.

Those first 12 minutes saw Wycombe completely in the

driving seat. Their first time football, precision passing and all-out attack had Hitchin reeling. The only trouble was... there were no goals.

The visitors suffered a setback when centre-half John Kettleborough had to go off with a mouth injury after 17 minutes. Six minutes later, substitute Webb came on with Town having to rearrange their ranks for the rest of the game. The lack of height at centre-back was clearly evident, although rarely exploited by the home side.

Tony Horseman had two good chances to open the scoring in the next 10 minutes but after blazing the first one over the bar, he was then thwarted by Parkin's fingertips after latching onto a Paul Giggie ball pass. Then, with 38 minutes gone, Perrin cracked in the first goal — a beauty. Birdseye's free kick, 10 yards inside Hitchin territory, went straight to Steve just outside the box. Turning inside one defender, he let fly first time and saw the ball race past

the goalkeeper into the far corner.

Before Wycombe could sit back and savour the score, Hitchin were on the attack for one of the few times in the half. And only some brilliant goalkeeping by Mead kept them at bay. Goalkeeper John Maskell fumbled a pass back inside the box and Tony Brothers crossed the ball inside. Big Howard Kettleborough thundered in a drive which Mead cleared off the line as far as Brothers. His next effort was again blocked as far as Trevor Williams who returned the ball towards the net. Who was there again? Keith Mead and this time his clearance was thumped clear.

That 30 second scramble was about the closest Hitchin came to a goal and despite working hard throughout the second half they lacked the penetration upfront to seriously test Wycombe again. Another reshuffle at half time saw Neil Bunker, who had been drafted into the back four after Kettleborough's departure, return to his forward role with Armstrong moving to centre-back and Webb to right-back.

After Horseman had scraped the upright with a header, it soon became obvious a second goal was needed to steady Wycombe and to put the result beyond reach, especially after 61 minutes when Howard Kettleborough almost made it 1-1. Maskell, however, timed his challenge perfectly and spread himself in front of the striker's feet right at the point of impact, blocking the powerful drive.

By now, Wycombe's first half tactics of first time passing were coming unstuck in the fast, deteriorating conditions. With players unable to take a firm footing, passes only fractionally off the mark gave away possession or came to an early halt in the mud. It was during a spell when Wanderers were struggling that Perrin hit the second and crucial goal.

Holfield created the chance by swivelling on the ball and then racing between two defenders. That gave him enough time to lay the ball across the box to Perrin who thumped home a firm shot despite falling in the process. The goal epitomised Steve's confidence at the moment. Improving with every game, he is the team's most dangerous forward by far, as clubs of the calibre of Middlesbrough and Bournemouth have discovered this season.

Despite trailing 2-0, Hitchin never gave up trying and with a shade more luck could have snatched a goal back in the 67th minute. A corner on the right by Williams swung into the six yard box where Bunker powered in a header. Fortunately for Wycombe, Hand was on the line to boot the ball clear.

The match ended quietly after that, although Wanderers did have a couple of chances to increase their tally. Thanks to Steve Perrin, though, further goals weren't necessary.

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell, P. Griffiths, K. Mead, A. Phillips, G. Hand; M. Holfield, P. Birdseye, H. Kennedy; A. Horseman, K. Searle, S. Perrin. Sub. G. Mackenzie (not used).

HITCHIN: D. Parkin; G. Armstrong, M. Howkins, J. Kettleborough (sub. D. Webb 23 mins.), R. Grant, T. Williams, A. Brothers, P. Watson, N. Bunker, H. Kettleborough, P. Giggie.

Referee: R. Lewis (St. Bookham).
Half time: 1-0 **Goalscorer:** Wycombe — Perrin 2 (38, 63).
Official playing attendance: 778.
Approximate total attendance: 1,000.

Friendly

WYCOMBE Wanderers have arranged a friendly against Southern Leaguers Cheltenham Town on Tuesday (7.30) at Loakes Park. The two teams met this season in the first round of the F.A. Cup with Wycombe winning 3-1 after one of the best games at the ground this season.